

# **COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION POLICY**

## **1. BACKGROUND/HISTORY**

Our society has experienced an explosion of violent behavior as persons increasingly resort to violence as a means to “solve” their problems. Instances of domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, along with a lessened regard and concern for each other, have invaded the workplace. Violence at work is now the second leading cause of all on-the-job fatalities and the leading cause of workplace death among women, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The perception of the workplace as less than safe has an immeasurable negative impact upon all County employees and their ability to provide effective services to our community.

## **2. WORKPLACE VIOLENCE – POLICY STATEMENT**

As an employer, Milwaukee County is concerned about a safe workplace for employees and the public. Toward that end, Milwaukee County is committed to a zero tolerance workplace violence policy and reaffirms the right of all to a safe working environment. The County will not tolerate acts of violence committed by or against County employees or members of the public while on County property or while engaging in Milwaukee County business at other locations (non-County facilities). Moreover, the County will provide support mechanisms for and enforce its commitment to a workplace free from violence.

## **3. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this policy are as follows:

1. Reduce the potential for violence in and around the workplace;
2. Encourage and foster a work environment that is characterized by respect and healthy conflict resolution;
3. Mitigate the negative consequences for employees who experience or encounter violence while at work;
4. Protect employees who are working and who may be experiencing threats of violence from anyone, either an employee or a non-employee; and
5. Protect employees who are working off County property or in non-County facilities.

## **4. DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Workplace violence can be defined as behavior that causes injury, suffering or discomfort to others at work or while engaged in work. Workplace violence includes physical injury and suffering from beatings, stabbings, shootings or rapes. Non-physical suffering can include such things as threats, obscene telephone calls,

harassment, swearing, shouting, stalking or intimidating employees. Workplace violence incidents fall into four categories.

1. violence by a domestic partner
2. violence by customers, clients or patients
3. violence by co-workers
4. violence by unknown individuals

The word violence in this policy shall mean an act or behavior that:

- Is physically assaultive;
- A reasonable person would perceive as obsessively directed, e.g., intensely focused on a grudge, grievance or irrational interest in another person, and reasonable likely to result in harm or threats to persons or property,
- Consists of a communicated or reasonably perceived threat to harm or in any way endanger the safety of an employee or another individual,
- Would be interpreted by a reasonable person as having the potential for physical harm to an employee or another individual,
- Is a behavior or action that a reasonable person would perceive as menacing,
- Involves carrying or displaying weapons, destroying property, or throwing objects in a manner reasonable perceived to be threatening, or
- Consists of a communicated or reasonable perceived threat to destroy property.

Violent actions on County property or facilities, or while on County business, will not be tolerated or ignored. Any violent actions committed by employees or members of the public while on County property or while using County facilities is prohibited. The County intends to use reasonable, legal, managerial, administrative and disciplinary procedures to secure the workplace from violence and/or reasonably protect employees or members of the public. Employees may be subject to disciplinary action, criminal prosecution, and/or other appropriate action.

## **5. PROCEDURES**

- A. An employee who is the victim of a violent act in the workplace should report the situation immediately to his/her supervisor and/or law enforcement personnel in accordance with the procedures established by this policy and the employee's department.
- B. An employee witnessing a violent act directed against another should observe the situation, attempt to get information such as the name of the alleged perpetrator, but only if it can be done without endangering the employee or others. An employee should report such incidents to his/her supervisor or law

enforcement personnel in accordance with the procedures established by this policy and the employee's department.

- C. When applicable, the County and its employees shall cooperate fully with police and other law enforcement officials in the investigation and prosecution of individuals who commit violent acts.
- D. The County, when appropriate, may pursue a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) and an injunction against any person who disrupts the workplace through the harassment of an employee.
- E. Employees who have obtained a TRO or injunction should inform their supervisors. If a County department or employee secures a TRO or injunction related to a County work site, the employee who is the victim of workplace violence will inform the Police District which covers the work site. If a TRO or injunction obtained by an employee at any work site relates to domestic violence, the employee or supervisor will refer to the Milwaukee County Domestic Violence Policy. The supervisor will consider the information given by the employee as confidential and will not inform co-workers of the injunction or TRO unless advised to do so by either the Sheriff's Department, the Department Head, Appointing Authority, or the Office of Corporation Counsel.
- F. No employee or third party, except for law enforcement personnel, is permitted to bring weapons or firearms into the workplace. This prohibition extends to carrying weapons or firearms in County vehicles.

## **6. RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Managers and Supervisors**

Managers and supervisors are responsible for assessing potentially violent situations, responding appropriately and then communicating information regarding the situation to the appropriate authority (manager/supervisor and/or the department head).

- ◆ Any report of violence will be evaluated immediately and confidentially by management and appropriate action will be taken in order to protect employees.
- ◆ Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken when it is determined that a Milwaukee County employee has committed an act of violence.
- ◆ Where issues of employee safety are of concern, managers and supervisors should evaluate the workplace and take appropriate steps, if any, to eliminate the potential for workplace violence.

## **Employees**

All employees are responsible for:

- ◆ Refraining from acts of violence in the workplace,
- ◆ Seeking assistance to resolve personal issues that may lead to acts of violence in the workplace, and
- ◆ Reporting to managers and supervisors any dangerous or threatening situations that occur outside of the workplace which may affect workplace safety, i.e., instances where protection orders have been issued, etc.

## **7. GUIDELINES**

When a violent act occurs:

- ◆ If the act or altercation constitutes an emergency, call 9-911 and immediately advise a manager or supervisor. In instances that are not emergency situations, immediately advise a manager or supervisor, who will contact the appropriate Human Resources Manager and/or Safety Representative, who will take responsibility for coordinating a response to the incident.
- ◆ In instances that involve emergency situations or suspected criminal activity, the Human Resources Manager and/or Safety Representative will contact the Sheriff's Department for assessment and, if necessary, investigation.
- ◆ When it is not appropriate to refer an incident to the Sheriff's Department, the Human Resources Manager and/or Safety Representative will evaluate the situation and conduct an investigation.
- ◆ In other cases, the Human Resources Manager and/or Safety Representative, in consultation with the Sheriff's Department and/or the Office of Corporation Counsel will determine who will conduct the investigation.
- ◆ To the extent practicable, investigation and resolutions shall be conducted in a confidential manner with appropriate notice to employee representatives.

When an employee notifies a supervisor/manager of a domestic violence situation spilling into the workplace,

- ◆ the Department Head/Appointing Authority should protect the confidentiality of its employees' names, home addresses and phone numbers, work schedules and locations. Department personnel should be wary of unusual requests for identifying information about an employee.
- ◆ Only legitimate requests for employee information should be released according to a department's established procedure. Unusual requests should be referred to the appropriate supervisor, for a decision to release requested information. The Department of Human Resources (Courthouse, Room 210), will process requests for information about employees according to its current release of information policies in effect (e.g., employment verifications, references, etc.)

- ◆ Each department should provide the “**Request to Limit Access To An Employee At Work and To Restrict Disclosure Of My Home Address and Telephone Number**” (see attachment 1). When an employee turns in the form, the department should make every effort to take appropriate security measures and restrict the release of personal information to the individual identified by the employee in the request.
- ◆ The department should forward a copy of the **Limit Access** form to the Department of Human Resources Compensation and Employment & Staffing Divisions, whose staff should take steps to restrict release of the employee’s home address, telephone number, work location and telephone number during the six month “limit access” period.

**ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT 2800**

**WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION POLICY**

**EMPLOYEE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM**

**The Workplace Violence Prevention Policy includes important information regarding the definition of workplace violence, the procedures to be followed in reporting/witnessing/reacting to violence in the workplace, and the responsibilities of various people in the department. I understand that it is my responsibility to read this policy and to abide by it.**

**My signature below indicates that I have received a copy of the Workplace Violence Prevention Policy.**

**EMPLOYEE'S NAME (Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**EMPLOYEE'S SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

<p>This form needs to be completed by the employee and the original sent to the Human Resources Manager (Courts) Room 104.</p>
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